E-mail is a Record

E-mail is a tool that is used to exchange messages and documents using telecommunications equipment and computers. E-mail messages are **public records** if they are created or received as part of a public employee's performing his or her official duties.

Michigan law requires that all public records be listed on an approved **Retention and Disposal Schedule** that identifies how long the records must be kept, when they may be destroyed and when certain records can be sent to the Archives of Michigan for permanent preservation. Records cannot be destroyed unless their disposal is authorized by an approved Retention and Disposal Schedule.

Just like paper records, e-mail records are used to support a variety of business processes. There is not a single retention period for e-mail. Each message must be evaluated for its content and purpose to determine the length of time it must be retained in accordance with the appropriate Retention and Disposal Schedule. Just like paper records, e-mail messages may be **evidence** of decisions and activities. Both senders and recipients of e-mail messages must determine if a particular message should be retained to document their role in agency activities.

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Records Management Services

Effective Solutions for Managing E-mail

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E-mail Retention

Records Management Services

has developed several tools to educate Michigan government employees about their responsibilities for properly managing e-mail. These educational tools help employees comply with record retention laws, effectively organize and locate their e-mail and related records, protect their agency from adverse consequences associated with Freedom of Information Act requests and litigation, and improve their business processes.

All of these educational tools are available online at:

www.michigan.gov/recordsmanagement

E-mail Retention Guidelines

These guidelines define four categories of e-mail: official records, transitory records, non-records, and personal records. They identify how long each category should be retained and who is responsible for retention.

Frequently Asked Questions about E-mail Retention

This guide addresses the basic facts that each employee should know about e-mail retention requirements.

Model E-mail Retention Policy

Each department or agency should adopt a policy that notifies employees about their responsibilities for retaining official e-mail records and identifies how e-mail should be stored. This fill-in-the-blank model policy serves as a template for agencies to follow. Management, information technology staff, and attorneys should work together to finalize a policy that addresses technology resources and legal vulnerabilities.

E-mail Storage Options

This guide addresses the pros and cons of the various storage options for e-mail messages. It will help agencies that are developing a policy for employees. Bottom line: e-mail should be stored with the other records that document the business process so employees only have to look in one place to find complete documentation of an activity or decision.

File Plan Template

Most employees don't know what a good file plan looks like. This model file plan will help employees develop a system to organize their records (paper and electronic).

Acceptable Use Policy

The Department of Information Technology promulgated Policy 1460.00 "Acceptable Use of State of Michigan Technology Resources." This policy applies to state employees only; however, local governments may want to adopt similar use or etiquette policies for their employees to follow.

E-mail Retention Training

This free online course is available to all Michigan government employees. Employees can access the course from any computer with an Internet connection. It takes about 30 minutes to complete the course. This interactive course covers basic records management requirements, the categories of e-mail, FOIA and litigation, organizing files, and more. Managers are encouraged to designate this course as mandatory for all employees.